Opportunity Makes A thief

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Opportunity Makes A thief

by Bordementions

Summary

You plan to rob Cipher of the only friend she's ever had, so begrudgingly, she decides rob you of everything first

Notes

I like this catgirl very much if you couldn't tell she is pretty cool and I don't at all want her to do nefarious things to me and this story will end with happy ending I swear i promise it will all end up fine and they will live happily ever after

I like cipher as a friend and would only ever write out happy loving fluff stories with her character and definitely wouldn't utilize headcanons and story backgrounds to create negative attributes of her character to exploit and use to show her being a terrible person as a consequence of her upbringing

hahahhaahahaahahhhahahha

more to come later when I get back from the schoolhouse

https://discord.gg/KjnFJ6HG6a

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

The hideout was dead quiet. Save for the low, hollow moan of the wind filtering through the warped siding and the occasional, skittering scratching of rats in the dark, cluttered corners, the space was entirely devoid of life.

Because for once, there were no stolen trinkets being meticulously sorted across the scarred wooden table. No gleaming piles of silver and copper coins. No grease-smudged parchment maps covered in ink markings and hasty escape routes across the jagged rooftops of Dolos. There were no heated, whispered arguments over who had dibs on the newly discovered estate or who had pulled off the cleaner heist the night before.

Just silence. Cold, heavy, and miserable.

The old room sat hidden away like a forgotten secret, wedged precariously between the deteriorating walls of two abandoned warehouses overlooking one of the lower districts of Dolos. It was a bleak, decaying pocket of the city that neither the city guards nor any competent, self-respecting thieves bothered with anymore. The roof leaked a steady, rhythmic drip whenever it rained. The floorboards groaned in protest under the slightest weight. The windows had long ago been boarded over with rotting timber, choking out the daylight.

Which meant, for someone trying to disappear, it was absolutely perfect.

You sat slumped against the damp plaster of the wall, your shoulders hitched, breathing in slow, measured increments. Every single rise and fall of your chest hurt. It felt as though someone had taken a sledgehammer to your sternum, leaving a dull, radiating ache that flared with every deep breath. Your left arm was wrapped tightly in coarse muslin from the curve of your shoulder down to your wrist, immobilizing the sprain. Your knuckles were split open, the small cuts caked with dark, dried blood. Deep, purplish bruises stained nearly every exposed inch of your skin.

But it was the injury higher up, wrapped tightly in layers of heavily blood-stained bandages around your head, that made every other ache seem utterly insignificant.

Your missing eye. The empty socket beneath the cloth throbbed with a

throbbing, agonizing heat. It was a permanent reminder. A souvenir of a city turning rot-black.

Twenty guards. Twenty.

And the bitter irony of it all was that you hadn't even been pulling a job. You hadn't been scouting a ledger or slipping a velvet purse from a noble's hip. You had simply been buying food. Some stale bread, a handful of wrinkled, dried fruit—nothing special, nothing that should have warranted a second glance from anyone.

Yet someone had recognized you. Just one person. That was all it took in Dolos these days—one little shout, a singular, sharp accusation, one terrified merchant screaming your name to the streets. Suddenly, it was as if half the district's garrison had descended upon the alleyways, bloodthirsty and relentless.

The chaotic memory of the ambush flashed behind your eyelids. You remembered the first guard's spear whistling as it passed just under your arm, the splintering crack of a second guard's club grazing your shoulder, a third lunging forward to tackle you, desperate to cut off your balance.

Then more came. And more.

And more.

The city had changed. The sprawling, defiant Dolos you and Cipher had grown up in barely existed anymore. The gap had widened into a chasm; the nobles had become unimaginably richer, the poor had become desperate and hollowed out, and the punishments had become draconian. People disappeared from the lower districts every day without a whisper. Public hangings, once a rare and somber affair, had been twisted into a form of cruel street entertainment for the high-born. The city that had once laughed in the face of authority, treating the law like a game of wits, now bent double beneath its iron heel. Anyone even suspected of being a shadow on the wall, let alone connected to the myth of the Three Hundred Rogues, was hunted like a rabid dog.

In a twisted way, you were lucky they had only taken an eye and left you with your life.

You closed your remaining eye, exhaling a slow, shaky breath, trying your absolute best to lock away the memory of the five guards you had killed to escape that alley.

You didn't like killing. You never had. Even back when the brutal reality of survival in the slums demanded violence, you had always prided yourself on the clean getaway—the ghost in the night who left no bodies in their wake. But this time, there had been no choice. Not when they had cornered you against the brickwork. Not when they had almost succeeded in beating you to death on the stones. Not when one of them had pinned your head and brutally driven their thumb into your eye socket.

Your right hand unconsciously tightened into a fist against the floorboards, the memory still fresh, vivid, and blindingly painful. A long, weary sigh escaped your cracked lips.

Then—a subtle displacement in the air. An ever-so-faint rustle. The distinct, soft whisper of moving fabric.

Despite how minute the sound was, you didn't even need to see it. You had heard that specific, weightless landing so many thousands of times over the years that it practically had it's own little place reserved in the back of your head.

A familiar, casual voice immediately followed the silence. "Yikes." A brief, calculating pause. "Who beat you up?"

Another beat of silence. "Actually, wait. Let me guess."

You forced your remaining eye open. Cipher was sitting upside down, hooked effortlessly by her knees on one of the exposed ceiling beams above. One moment the rafters had been nothing but shadows and dust; the next, she simply existed, defying gravity with an easy, nonchalant grace.

Her tail lazily swayed behind her, cutting slow arcs through the air. Bright, piercing cyan eyes stared down at you through the gloom, and a familiar, sharp grin stretched across her face. "You look awful."

You simply stared back, lacking the energy to offer a retort.

She pointed down at you dramatically, shifting her weight on the beam. "You've got blood." She shifted her finger. "More blood." A third, sweeping point. "Oh, wow. Would you believe it? Even more blood."

A dry, involuntary snort escaped your nose. The sudden movement jarred your torso, making your fractured ribs flare with pain.

Cipher immediately burst into a bright, echoing laugh. "There they are!"

With a fluid, cat-like twist, she swung down from the beam, dropping through the air and landing soundlessly on the dusty floorboards. "You know, I leave you alone for a few days and suddenly you decide getting stabbed isn't thrilling enough anymore." She stepped closer, her eyes instantly tracking to the thick layers of linen wrapped around your skull. Her voice dropped its theatrical edge, replaced by a sharp curiosity. "You lose your eye trying to impress somebody?"

You gave a weak, dismissive shrug.

Her grin widened again, trying to coax the usual banter out of you. "Ooooh." She leaned in, her face inches from yours, studying the damage. "Or maybe... you're just getting old."

You rolled your eye best you could manage, leaning your head back against the wall.

Cipher gasped dramatically, clapping a hand over her mouth. "I'm right aren't I?!" She pointed an accusing finger. "See? That's exactly the expression old people make when their joints forecast the rain. You're losing your edge."

She looked entirely too pleased with herself, basking in the familiar rhythm of your back-and-forth. For a fleeting moment, at least. Then, the sharp lines of her smile began to fade. Just slightly. Because she was finally close enough to read the reality written across your body.

The deep, mottled bruising. The heavy scent of copper and salves. The uneven, shallow hitch in your breathing. The rigid way you were favoring your right side to protect your ribs, the sheer, bone-deep exhaustion radiating from your posture, and the fact that you hadn't moved an inch since she had dropped in.

Her ears twitched, flattening slightly against her head. The teasing facade vanished in an instant. "Ah," she murmured quietly, her voice losing its brassy edge. "That bad?"

You gave a small, barely perceptible nod. The room fell into a heavy, suffocating silence.

Cipher stared down at you, the playful light in her eyes dimming into something serious, something fiercely protective. You stared back, letting her see the toll the alley had taken.

Then she sighed, a long, deflating sound, and dropped her head. "Damn."

She slid down against the wall, sitting right beside you—much closer than she usually did, abandoning her usual need for personal space. Her tail settled quietly across the floorboards near your boots. "You really got messed up."

Recognizing the rare, heavy dip in her mood, you forced the corners of your mouth upward, offering a small, fragile smile. It was your way of trying to lighten the mood, a silent message telling her that it wasn't the end of the world, that you were still breathing at the very least.

It worked, but only a little. She huffed, turning her head away with a click of her tongue. "You always do that."

You tilted your head, questioning her.

"Smile," she repeated, pointing a finger at your face. "That stupid smile. You could be missing half your body, bleeding out into the gutters, and you'd still somehow look up like everything's perfectly fine."

A genuine chuckle caught in your throat, but you regretted it the instant it formed. The sudden contraction made the pain in your ribs return with a vicious, stabbing vengeance, causing you to wince and catch your breath.

Cipher flinched in tandem with you. "Okay, don't do that. Stop."

You gave her a flat, dry look with your one eye.

She pointed at you again, her tone uncharacteristically firm. "I'm serious. Don't break yourself more while I'm sitting here."

Another pause stretched between you, filled only by the distant whistle of the wind. Then, she nudged her shoulder against yours—an action that was surprisingly, deliberately gentle.

"So," her grin returned, stretching a little bit bigger this time as she tried to force the shadow out of the room. "When's your next run?"

You blinked, momentarily thrown off by the question.

She continued rapidly, gesturing with her hands. "Got any targets

lined up? Noble estates? Vaults?"

"No," you breathed out quietly.

"Plans?" she pushed.

You shook your head, the movement sending a dull throb through your temple.

"Jobs? Tips from the network?"

Nothing.

Cipher's brow furrowed, a genuine look of discontent crossing her features. "Why not?"

You simply looked at her, letting the silence stretch, before raising your uninjured hand and pointing directly toward the thick, blood-stained bandages covering the left side of your face.

Cipher stared at your finger, then at the bandage, and then she shrugged casually. "Yeah? And?"

You stared at her, utterly incredulous.

She stared right back, her expression perfectly blank. "...What?"

You couldn't help it. Despite the impending ache in your chest, a sharp, disbelieving laugh escaped your lips.

Cipher looked genuinely, profoundly confused by your reaction. "You lost an eye," she said, gesturing vaguely toward your head. "That's bad. Really bad." She nodded firmly to emphasize the point. "But since when is a little less peripheral vision enough to stop you?"

You blinked, momentarily speechless.

Cipher continued listing off your history as though she were reading a grocery list, counting on her fingers. "You've broken both legs before, down in the lower docks." She popped up a finger. "You got stabbed clean through the shoulder by that bounty hunter." A second finger. "You got thrown off a three-story roof by guild enforcers." A third finger. "You got buried alive in a collapsed tunnel under the treasury." A fourth finger. "And you somehow survived being blown up by an explosive trap." A fifth finger appeared. She paused, her eyes looking upward as she actually calculated the history. "...Twice, if I remember right."

You looked away, looking down at your lap, a faint trace of sheepishness crossing your face.

She leaned forward into your field of vision, her tail flicking with sudden impatience. "C'mon. You're seriously telling me one eye is where you draw the line? One of the all time greats from the Three Hundred Rogues, defeated by a lack of depth perception?"

You smiled again, softer this time, shaking your head despite yourself.

Cipher made a face, her eyes immediately lighting up. "See? I knew it."

But as your smirk subsided, your shoulders slumped further against the plaster. Cipher's eyes narrowed slightly. The triumphant grin slowly melted off her face as she studied you, looking past the missing eye, past the gruesome bruises, and past the easy facade you always wore for her.

For the first time since she had arrived, she realized something crucial. You weren't scared of the injury. You weren't upset about the loss of the eye, and you weren't even shaken by how close you had come to dying in the street.

What was eating away at you was something entirely different.

Cipher's paused momentarily. Her voice dropped into a quiet, tentative register. "...How many?"

You looked away from her, staring into one of the faraway corners.

"How many did you kill?" she asked softly.

Your right hand tightened into a fist against your knee, the leather of your glove creaking. Slowly, you lifted five fingers.

Cipher immediately understood.

The room became void again, the weight of the number settling over both of you. Five. Five lives ended in the grime of a back alley. For Cipher, a number like that wouldn't have caused a second thought—she was a creature of survival and pragmatism. But for you? You had always drawn a hard line. To you, those five bodies meant you had let Dolos drag you down into its meat grinder. She knew that. She knew you well enough to understand exactly why your spirit looked more broken than your ribs.

Her gaze lowered to the floorboards between her boots. "...You didn't have a choice."

You didn't answer.

"You know that, right?" she pressed, her voice unusually gentle, stripped of all its habitual mockery. "They weren't trying to arrest you. They were going to kill you."

Still, you said nothing, your jaw clenched.

Cipher sighed, a soft, heavy sound. Then, she leaned all the way over, pressing her shoulder firmly against yours, letting her warmth cut through the chill of the abandoned warehouse. "Hey."

You turned your head, looking at her.

"I know you," she said, her voice a comforting whisper. "You wouldn't have done it unless your back was completely against the wall. You didn't choose this. They did." She paused, her tail swaying in a slowly across the floor. "And if twenty guards jumped me in an alley? I'd expect you to do the exact same thing to get me out."

You looked down at your hands, at the dried blood beneath your fingernails. The city was changing. It was getting darker, meaner, more violent by the day. Or maybe it already had. Maybe it had been rotting from the inside out for years, and neither of you had wanted to admit it because admitting it meant acknowledging that the playground you loved had turned into a graveyard.

Cipher followed your gaze, staring at the dust motes dancing in the dim light. When she spoke again, her voice carried a rare, bittersweet edge. "Dolos isn't ours anymore."

The words felt incredibly strange coming from her. Sad. Almost grief-stricken. But then she nudged again—a little harder this time, intentionally jarring you just enough to break the spell. The familiar, playful grin slowly began to creep back onto her face.

"And besides," she pointed a sharp finger directly at your bandaged eye. "If you really choose to retire over this?" Her smile widened into a challenge. "I win our wager. By default."

You immediately snapped your head around to look at her, your eye wide.

Cipher burst out laughing, the sound ringing off the rafters. She pointed at you excitedly, her ears popping right back up. "That look! C’mon, I know you hate losing more than anything!"

She kept laughing for a moment, her tail swishing happily, waiting for you to fire back with your usual competitive spark. But the retort never came. You just watched her, the exhaustion pulling heavily at your face, unable to match her energy.

Slowly, Cipher's laughter died away, tapering off into a quiet breath.

The room settled back into its silence. It wasn't an uncomfortable silence anymore, nor was it the miserable chill that had filled the room before she arrived. It was just a quiet, heavy understanding that lingered between the two of you—two thieves sitting in the wreckage of a changing world, trying to figure out what came next.

Because that's what color the world had turned. The mottled purples and blues of the fresh bruises, the dark, crusting red of dried blood in the creases of your skin, and the tremor—the faint, persistent shaking that still hadn't entirely stopped.

How were you supposed to explain it to her? How were you supposed to put words to something you barely understood yourself?

Years ago, neither of you would have hesitated. It was simple back then. If guards appeared, you ran. If the authorities cracked down, you adapted, finding tighter alleyways and higher roofs. If the rich got richer, you simply stole more from them. That was how Dolos worked. That was how it had always worked. But not anymore. The city wasn't fighting thieves anymore; the city was hunting them. The difference mattered. It changed the very air you breathed, and you had seen it happening day by day, block by block.

The sudden, silent disappearances of families overnight. Children arrested in the squares simply for carrying messages between districts. Markets that were once sanctuaries of gossip now bristled with eyes and ears, full of desperate informants selling one another out for a handful of coins. Even the slums felt different now. Fear had settled deep into the structural cracks of the city, bleeding it of its vibrant, rebellious spirit. And fear was a difficult thing to steal from.

You exhaled quietly, the sound whistling through your teeth.

Beside you, Cipher’s sharp grin returned, cracking through her brief moment of sobriety. "We'll figure something out," she said breezily.

You didn't respond, but she continued anyway, her voice gaining momentum as she tried to spin the world back into a shape she recognized. "You rest up for a couple of weeks. Stop looking like you've been dragged through hell. Then, we go hit something big."

You shifted your face to look at her. She was already pacing her thoughts, her signature excitement bubbling to the surface.

"Maybe one of the inner-city vaults," she mused, her eyes lighting up with a dangerous, cyan spark. "Ooooh. No, wait—the treasury! Can you imagine? Do you know how mad that would make them?"

You shook your head slowly.

The movement jarred something in her. Her ears twitched, tilting forward as if she were trying to pick up on a sound or a frequency you weren't letting out.

Immediately noticing the shift, her tone softened. "...Still hurting?"

You nodded, a slow, heavy inclination of your head. But it wasn't a physical ache you were acknowledging.

Cipher frowned, misreading the gesture. "Hungry?" Without waiting for an answer, she was already pushing herself up from the floor, stretching her lithe frame. "Actually, yeah. You definitely look hungry. After getting your ass kicked that badly and still not getting anything to eat, I'd be cranky too." She turned, her tail swishing as she started walking toward the boarded-up window. "I'll go skim something from the market. Be right back."

Before she could take another step, you reached out, your right hand flashing through the dim light, and firmly grabbed the fabric of her sleeve.

Cipher stopped, blinking down at your grip. "Hm?"

You didn't say anything at first.

"No?" she asked, her brow furrowing.

Another shake.

Her confusion deepened. "What is it?"

You slowly lowered your hand, letting her sleeve slip from your fingers. The room felt incredibly heavy. After a long moment of

gathering your breath, you finally spoke, your voice rough, dry, and grating from disuse.

"I'm not stealing anymore."

Cipher blinked. Once. Twice. Then, a sharp, disbelieving laugh broke from her throat.

"Oh, okay. So you're concussed."

You just stared at her, your expression deadpan and unmoving.

She laughed again, though it sounded a bit more forced this time. "No, seriously. You must've gotten hit in the head way harder than I thought during your little scuffle down there. You don't mean that."

You didn't laugh. You didn't smile. You didn't even move. You just sat in the dust, looking up at her with a stark, unblinking gravity.

The grin slowly, completely disappeared from her face, her features flattening into a rare expression of pure vulnerability. "...You're serious?"

A small, agonizing nod was your only reply.

The old, ruined room suddenly felt much smaller, the walls closing in around the two of you. Cipher stared down at you, eyes wide, waiting for the punchline. The joke. The explanation that would turn this back into a game. But none came.

"...Why?" she whispered.

You looked away from her, your gaze drifting toward the rotting timber of the boarded window, trying to see past it to the sprawling, soot-choked city outside.

"Dolos," you said simply.

That was all you said. Just the name of the city. Yet somehow, because she knew every alleyway and gutter just as well as you did, she understood exactly what you meant.

"Dolos what?"

You were quiet for a moment, letting the distant groan of the warehouse structure fill the void. Then, you finally forced the truth into the open.

"It's over." The words tasted like ash, feeling entirely wrong as they left your mouth. It felt like admitting defeat, like breaking a vow you'd kept since childhood. "I can't keep doing this, Ciphera. They recognized me just buying food. Not doing anything wrong. Buying bread. I barely survived it. Next time... next time I probably won't."

You swallowed hard, trying to force the next part out before your courage failed you. "I've talked with others."

Her eyes narrowed sharply at that. Others. The word caught her attention like a knife twisting in a wound. "Who?"

You ignored the question, knowing that naming names would only anchor her anger to specific people. "A lot of them are leaving. A longer pause. Some already have."

Cipher's expression didn't change, but her tail stopped moving entirely, dropping dead against the ground.

"We've gathered what wealth we can," you continued, looking down at your hands. "We're leaving Dolos."

The silence that followed felt deafening, pressing against your eardrums like deep water. Cipher simply stood there, staring down at you as if you had transformed into a stranger. The temperature in the room seemed to plummet, leaving the air brittle and cold.

"...Leaving," she repeated, her voice flat.

You nodded.

"Leaving."

Another stretch of agonizing silence. Then, she let out a short, sharp laugh. It was a jagged, forced sound that rattled in her chest. "You mean for a job. A long-distance haul. Working in a differnt territory or something."

You shook your head. Her fragile smile faltered further.

"Or just... just a few months? To let the heat die down?"

Another slow shake of your head. The last trace of her smile disappeared completely.

"...Forever?"

You couldn't look her in the eye anymore. The weight of her gaze was too heavy. But eventually, you nodded. Slowly. Terminally.

The floorboards creaked sharply. Cipher had stepped back, standing at her full height. You hadn't even noticed the movement, but now her eyes were fixed on you, wide and unblinking. "That's stupid."

You looked up.

Her voice wasn't angry yet. Not completely. It was just laced with a frantic, looping confusion. "Why would you leave?"

You opened your mouth to answer, but she cut you off immediately, her hands flying out.

"No. Seriously. Why?" She gestured wildly toward the boarded windows, toward the invisible skyline. "This is Dolos. Our city. Our home."

You said nothing, letting her storm rage.

"Things get bad, so what?" Cipher continued, her voice rising, echoing off the high ceiling beams. "They've always been bad! We grew up dodging starvation and enforcers!"

You shook your head, your voice dropping into a quiet, firm register that cut right through her panic. "No."

That single word made her stop, her hands freezing mid-gesture.

"They haven't. Not like this." Your voice was barely a whisper now, heavy with the grief of a hundred broken promises. "But they are now."

She stared, her breath hitching.

"Everyone we knew is gone, Cipher," you continued, the truth tearing at your throat. "The old crews, the safe houses, the fences... they're all gone. Most of us are dead, or they're waiting on execution in a jail cell, or they're planning their way out right now." You swallowed back the lump in your throat. "And eventually... eventually it'll be us."

The room went dead silent again. Cipher looked away from you, she stared at the floor, staring at the slivers of gray light leaking through the gaps in the timber. Toward Dolos. The city she loved more than anything in the world. The city she had spent her life running

through, protecting in her own twisted way, stealing from, laughing in, and surviving against.

"No."

The answer came immediately, sharp and definitive. You hadn't even asked the question yet—hadn't yet extended the invitation—but somehow, she knew exactly what was coming.

"No."

Ignoring the white-hot agony in your ribs and the dull throbbing in your head, you slowly pushed yourself up from the wall, standing unsteadily on your feet. "Ciph—"

"No," her voice was firmer now, a wall of pure denial slamming down between you. "Don't."

You took a painful, limping step forward, closing the distance. "You should come with us."

"No."

Another step, your hand reaching out slightly. "You don't have to stay here and die for a ghost town, Cipher."

"No."

"Cipher, please."

"No!" Her tail lashed violently behind her, striking a stack of old crates. "You don't understand!"

You stopped dead in your tracks. Because her voice had changed. There was something raw and desperate hidden underneath her anger. Something profoundly frightened.

"This is Dolos," she whispered, gesturing at the floor, at the walls, at everything outside. "My city. Our city. We grew up here. We survived here when we had absolutely nothing else." Her voice cracked slightly, a sharp, ragged edge catching in her chest. "The Three Hundred Rogues came from these gutters. We made this place ours."

You could see her mind working frantically, her eyes darting around the room as she tried to rationalize the reality away, trying to make the pieces fit into a puzzle that had already been repainted.

"You just got hurt," she said, pointing an accusing, trembling finger at your chest. "That's it. You're tired. You're completely exhausted." Her words started coming faster, tumbling over one another in a desperate rush. "You lost an eye. It's a horrible injury, but you've been through worse! You just need rest, that's all it is."

A tiny, nervous laugh escaped her lips, completely devoid of mirth. "Seriously. A few weeks. Maybe a month, even two. You just sit here, I'll bring you food, you heal up." Then her grin appeared—forced, rigid, and so fragile it looked ready to shatter at a touch. "And then we'll do another run. We'll race across the rooftops again. We'll rob somebody incredibly important, someone who deserves it. We'll—"

Her voice faltered, dying out into the cold air of the warehouse. Because you weren't smiling. You weren't agreeing. You weren't even arguing with her. You were just looking at her with a quiet, devastating sorrow.

And suddenly, the truth hit her like a physical blow. You had already decided. Long before today. Long before this conversation. Long before she had come here today to meet you. The realization seemed to strike her harder than anything ever could.

Her face lowered completely, the forced grin vanished. And for the first time since you had known her—through all the narrow escapes, the botched heists, and the bloody turf wars—Cipher looked genuinely, profoundly afraid. Not of guards. Not of death. Not of losing a fight. She was terrified of being left behind.

"...You're really leaving," she whispered, the words barely carrying enough weight to disturb the dust in the air.

She stood frozen, repeating the phrase as if trying to understand a foreign language. "...You're leaving."

Those words, you hated hearing them. Not because they were cruel, but because they were true.

Cipher stood motionless in the center of the hideout. Her eyes were fixed on you, burning with a fierce, desperate intensity, as if she could somehow force reality to bend and rewrite itself if she just stared hard enough.

You opened your mouth to say something—anything—but nothing came out. What was left to say? You had spent months arriving at this choice. You had watched the horizons, watched streets die out,

watched old friends turn into execution notices on the city boards. You had watched Dolos slowly distort into a monster that ate its own children. This wasn't a sudden whim; it was years of accumulation. Yet, saying it aloud to her felt like an act of betrayal. Because now it wasn't just a quiet thought in your head. Now it was real. And she knew it.

Then, suddenly, her posture snapped taut. "You know what?" her voice cut through the silence, sharp and dangerous as a blade.

You blinked, caught off guard by the sudden spike in her energy.

Cipher laughed. It wasn't a happy sound—it was the jagged, volatile laugh of someone desperately trying not to scream or tear the walls down. She turned her back to you, pacing a few steps away, before spinning around on her heel to face you again. "Fine."

Her grin returned, wide and bright, but it was entirely wrong. It was far too wide, a manic mask stretched tight over her features. "If that's really all it takes."

You frowned, your brow furrowing. "Cipher—"

"If things get a little harder and suddenly you're running away," she interrupted, her grin turning sharper, meaner, "I guess I just completely overestimated you."

The words dripping with an artificial malice as she threw her hands into the air. "Seriously! One bad fight? One?"

You opened your mouth to defend yourself, but she cut you off instantly, stepping closer. "Oh no. No. Don't give me that look!" She pointed a finger directly at your bandaged face. "You think I haven't been beaten before? You think I haven't almost died a dozen times over in these streets? You think you're the only thief in Dolos getting hunted right now?"

The room felt as though it were shrinking by the second. But you didn't fire back. You could see right through the vitriol now—the sheer panic, the wild desperation, and the fear, all of it clawing to hide behind a shield of anger.

Cipher began to pace back and forth across the creaking floorboards, her movements erratic. "Aeons," she muttered, her voice dripping with thick, heavy sarcasm. "You sound just like one of those pathetic, retired old rogues. 'Oh, the city isn't what it used to be. Things are

different now, kid. Maybe it's time to settle down and plant a garden.'" She snorted, a bitter, ugly sound, before stopping to look directly at you. "And now you're standing there saying the exact same thing."

You stayed silent, refusing to feed the fire. But your quietness only seemed to stoke her fury further.

"Say something!" she yelled, her voice echoing off the walls.

You didn't.

"Come on!" She stepped closer, her chest heaving. "Tell me I'm wrong! Tell me you aren't just giving up!"

Unable to meet the raw, burning intensity of her gaze, you looked down, far away from her.

And that was answer enough. Cipher's expression twisted, a flash of profound, agonizing hurt cutting across her face before she instantly locked it away behind another wall of defensive spite.

"You know what your problem is?" she said, stepping right into your space. "You care too much."

You blinked, genuinely startled. "What?"

"You care too much!" she shouted, and then she jabbed a finger directly into your sternum, completely ignoring your injuries. "You always have! Every stupid guard, every beggar in the alley, every random idiot on the street—you carry all of them around on your shoulders like it's your personal responsibility!"

She brought her hand back for another sharp jab. "And now, five dead guards who were trying to murder you anyway, and suddenly you're acting like the entire world just ended!"

Before her finger could strike your bruised chest a second time, your hand shot out and caught her by the wrist. You didn't squeeze hard—just enough to halt the movement, your grip steady despite the tremor.

The momentum vanished. The room went utterly quiet.

Because as you held her arm there in the space between you, the anger evaporated, leaving the truth bare. You both knew that wasn't what this was about. Cipher knew it. You knew it.

The silence dragged on, heavy and suffocating, until the tension finally broke. Cipher's shoulders slumped, just a fraction, before she pulled her wrist from your grip and straightened up again, trying to find a different angle, a different way to fix the unfixable.

"You don't mean it," she said, her voice dropping its volume, shifting back into pleading. You closed your eye, unable to watch her unravel. "You're just exhausted. You're severely injured. I mean... you nearly died, didn't you? It makes sense that you're talking crazy."

She let out another laugh, but it was completely hollow now, a ghost of her usual bravado. "You're already planning the next heist in your head, aren't you? You're just trying to scare me."

She rubbed her face with both hands, her tail dragging listlessly behind her. She was trying to think. Trying to scan her mind for the correct words, the magical sentence that would make everything better, the one perfect argument that would somehow convince you to stay.

But she couldn't think of a single thing. Because it didn't exist.

Her head filling again with that awful, chilling realization. She was losing. Not an argument, not a wager, and not a rooftop race. She was losing you. And for someone like Cipher, who had built her entire life around winning against a world that wanted to crush her, those things weren't very different at all.

You watched the exact moment the reality finally settled deep into her bones. You saw the fight leave her body all at once. The defensive anger vanished in an instant, leaving behind nothing but an immense, crushing exhaustion.

"...Sorry," she murmured. The word was so quiet, so thoroughly drained of air, that you almost missed it. "I'm sorry."

You just stared at her, your heart aching worse than ever.

She let out a weak, breathless little laugh that died before it could even form. "I didn't mean any of that. None of it, you know that."

The violent storm of her denial had finally passed, leaving behind something far worse in its wake: the quiet, cold dawn of acceptance. It wasn't complete acceptance—not yet—but it was the agonizing beginning of it. You knew what that felt like, more than most people.

Cipher tried to sit back down next to you again, sliding down the damp stone beside you, closer this time than she had been all evening. All over you like a desperate anchor.

Neither of you spoke. Minutes stretched out, measured only by the rhythmic, heavy dripping of water somewhere deep in the warehouse walls and the distant, muffled hum of the outside.

Then, suddenly, she broke the quiet. "You know," her voice was casual —far too casual, carrying a forced, airy lightness that immediately made your instincts prickle with suspicion. "The kids still ask about you."

You froze, your breathing catching in your throat. Cipher immediately noticed the subtle stiffening of your posture.

"They do," she murmured, leaning her head back against the plaster to stare up at the shadows masking the ceiling beams. "Actually," a small smile tugged at the corner of her mouth, "they complain about you constantly."

A low, involuntary groan escaped your chest.

Cipher let out a soft, melodic laugh. "Especially that little menace. You know exactly which one I mean."

Unfortunately, you did. You could practically picture the kid's dirt-smudged face and stubborn glare.

"Always asking where you are, why you haven't dropped by," she continued, her smile softening into something wistful. "They think you're actively avoiding them."

You shook your head, staring at your knees.

Cipher shifted, her voice dropping. "They miss you."

The words landed with a heavier, more devastating impact than any of her previous anger or wild accusations. Because unlike her furious denials, unlike her desperate attempts to guilt you into staying—this part was undeniably true. You had been scarce lately. You had spent the last several weeks pulling away, entirely consumed by the exhausting logistics of planning an escape route out of Dolos, coordinating with the other fleeing rogues, and making sure there would be a life waiting for you beyond the border. You hadn't seen the kids nearly enough.

Cipher watched your expression out of the corner of her eye, trying her absolute best to maintain her detached, nonchalant facade, and failing completely. Her ears twitched with nervous energy. "They still talk about that time you sat them down and taught them how to properly cheat at cards."

You immediately raised your uninjured hand, pointing at her. "Excuse you. That was educational. It's practically a survival skill here."

You rolled your single remaining eye, but the fond memory offered a fleeting warmth against the chill in your chest.

She laughed softly, the sound fluttering through the gloom before it died away into something much smaller, much more fragile. "They really do miss you."

The room fell completely silent again. You knew exactly what she was doing. She was invoking the children, using the weight of their affection to pull at the fraying edges of your resolve, to anchor you to the dirt of Dolos. And she knew that you knew. But neither of you acknowledged the silent tug-of-war.

After a long while, she spoke again. "Before you go..." her voice shrank, cracking slightly on the vowels, "...could you at least come see them?"

You shifted your head to look over at her. For the first time all evening, Cipher wasn't smiling. She wasn't joking, she wasn't putting on a theatrical display, and she wasn't trying to manipulate you—not entirely. There was still a faint trace of desperation behind it, but beneath the armor sat something entirely genuine, a raw, exposed vulnerability. She wanted you to see them. Maybe for the sake of the children's closure. Maybe for herself, to delay the inevitable for just a few more hours. Probably both.

"They think of you like family," she whispered, her tail curling tightly around her ankles. "Like an older sibling. They... they deserve a real goodbye."

You sat there in the heavy darkness, the aching in your body matched only by the crushing weight of your choices. You thought of the kids, of the city that was slowly starving them, and of the brutal reality that leaving meant leaving them behind too. Eventually, slowly, you nodded your head.

Cipher immediately snapped her head up, a brilliant, wild spark of

hope flashing across her eyes. It lasted for only a fraction of a second before she caught herself, hastily pulling the shutter closed over her emotions and clearing her throat to regain her composure. "Oh. Good, good." She shifted uncomfortably. "That's..." Another awkward, heavy pause. "That's good."

Neither of you mentioned the fact that her voice had sounded dangerously unsteady, trembling on the edge of a sob. Neither of you mentioned how tightly her hands were clenched into the fabric of her shirt, or the sudden, overwhelming relief that radiated from her posture. Because for now, at least, there was still one more meeting left. One more day. One more goodbye to pull off.

And judging by the way Cipher stared intently at the floor afterward, her eyes tracking the dust motes, she intended to use every single second of that time she could manage to steal.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Driven into a corner Cipher does the only thing she can think of, anything to get you to stay just a little bit longer

Chapter Notes

> smaller continuation just to finish off the rest of the story, cipher is a good person I swear and she is doing it out of love please forgive her

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The walk through the lower districts of Dolos felt profoundly... different.

It wasn't just because of the physical pain racking your frame, though there was plenty of that to go around. Every single step you took sent a jarring ache through your battered body. Your ribs throbbed with every intake of breath and your head felt as though a railroad spike were being driven through your skull.

But none of that visceral pain was what truly bothered you. It was the city itself.

The labyrinthine streets felt emptier, more hollowed out than they ever had before. Shops that once burst with noise and vibrant color were shuttered tight with iron bars. Windows were heavily boarded over against the night. The people you did pass moved like ghosts through the fog, keeping their heads ducked low, avoiding any semblance of eye contact, terrified of drawing a second glance from the patrols. The unique, chaotic city of thieves had been thoroughly broken, twisted into a silent metropolis of pure, suffocating fear.

You and Cipher moved across the shadowed rooftops and through the narrow, filth-slicked alleyways mostly in absolute silence. Occasionally, out of sheer habit, she would reach out and point something out to you—a broken sign, a shifting guard patrol route, or some merchant's terrace you had once successfully plundered together years ago. But neither of you actually talked.

The heavy, uncomfortable conversation from the warehouse still hung like a unfamiliar shroud between you, a fragile barrier neither of you

was willing to touch or break again.

Eventually though, the familiar sewer entrance appeared, tucked away in a dead-end alcove hidden behind a mass of rusted iron pipes and crumbling, soot-stained stonework. It was the entrance to the deep sanctuary—the one place Cipher had never shown to a single living soul, except for a precious few.

Cipher looked back at you, a smile pulling at her lips that was just a fraction too bright to be real. "They'll be excited to see you," she said, her voice echoing slightly in the stone alcove.

You gave her a quiet, tired nod.

"They've been driving me absolutely crazy asking where you've been," she continued, her smile stretching wider, a desperate, frantic glint returning to her eyes. "Who knows... maybe seeing them will convince you to stay after all."

You paused, turning your face toward her, giving her a flat, heavy look with your remaining eye. The forced smile faltered on her face, crumbling briefly before she stubbornly pulled it back into place.

"Right," she muttered, turning away.

Neither of you spoke another word after that.

Together, you descended into the damp, echoing dark of the subterranean tunnels. You slipped past the massive, humming water mains, past the rhythmic dripping of stagnant condensation, navigating the familiar, twisting stone passages by muscle memory alone, until you finally reached the heavy wooden door of the hidden room. The old refuge.

It was a space carved out of the city's forgotten infrastructure, filled with a chaotic assortment of mismatched furniture, pile upon pile of stolen wool blankets, tattered picture books, and faded, repainted toys. It was a makeshift home for a handful of orphaned children who otherwise would have been chewed up and spit out by the streets of Dolos.

You stepped over the threshold into the room, braced for the usual chaotic wall of sound. But only an absolute, crushing silence greeted you.

Your brow furrowed, your single eye darting across the space. No

high-pitched voices. No bright laughter. No petty arguments over dinner. No children. The underground sanctuary was entirely empty.

You looked around, a sudden knot of confusion and unease tightening in your stomach. The blankets were still tossed across the cots. The toys were scattered across the fancy rugs. All the clear, distinct signs that people had been living here just hours ago remained perfectly intact. But there wasn't a soul in sight.

You turned around on your heel, opening your mouth to ask Cipher where they were—

Then—something thick and coarse slammed over your mouth and nose from behind. A heavy cloth.

Your remaining eye widened in sudden shock. Years of hard-wired survival instincts immediately kicked in; your muscles tensed, your right hand flashing up to rip at the iron-tight arm locked around your throat. You tried to twist your hips, tried to throw your weight forward to break the hold, tried desperately to tear yourself free.

But your body was already broken. You were weak, your reactions drastically slowed by the accumulated damage.

And the person pinned to your back wasn't a random conscripted city guard. It was Cipher. She was faster than lightning, strong, and entirely relentless. Your frantic, agonizing struggles lasted for only a matter of seconds before her grip locked down like a vise.

A sharp, cloying smell flooded your nose. It was sweet, heavy, and intensely chemical.

Almost instantly, your thoughts became sluggish, turning to thick mud. The room tilted violently on its axis. The lantern light smeared into long, sickening streaks of yellow. The strength completely drained from your legs, your knees buckling beneath you.

The last thing you saw before the encroaching darkness claimed your vision was Cipher's face hovering over yours. She didn't look triumphant. She didn't look angry. Her features were set in an expression of grim, unyielding determination—but beneath it, her eyes were wide, hollow, and utterly terrified.

The very next thing was pain.

That was the very first thing that registered in your consciousness.

The second thing you felt was the cold. A deep, biting chill that seeped into your skin from the stone floor. Your head pounded with a vicious, slow throb that kept pace with your pulse, and your thoughts swam through a thick, heavy fog. Everything felt incredibly distant, muted, and heavy.

You let out a low, pathetic groan, forcing your eye open. The room blurred wildly, spinning in dizzying circles before the details gradually came into a harsh, trembling focus.

Mottled stone walls. Rusted overhead pipes. The dim, flickering amber glow of a single oil lantern. The same underground hideout.

A wave of confusion surfaced through the haze. You tried to shift your weight, tried to pull your arms down to push yourself up, but nothing happened. Your heart skipped a beat, a cold jolt of adrenaline cutting through the lethargy. You looked up.

Your arms were stretched completely taut over your head, pinned firmly against a thick pipe running along the wall. Your wrists were tightly secured with heavy, coarse rope and metal shackles. You pulled against them, your breath hitching, but the restraints didn't budge even a millimeter. A horrific unease settled deep into the pit of your stomach.

Then, your eye tracked lower, and you noticed her.

Cipher was sitting several feet away on an overturned crate, entirely curled into herself. Her knees were pulled tightly against her chest, her chin resting on her kneecaps, and her tail was wrapped rigidly around her legs like a protective barrier. Her hood was pulled down, her hair completely disheveled and tangled, and her eyes were bloodshot and heavily rimmed with red.

She looked absolutely awful. She looked like she hadn't stopped crying for hours, or like she hadn't slept in days. Or both.

Suddenly, her ears twitched sharply, picking up the sound of your shifting weight and the faint rattle of the couple chain links between your hands. She realized you were awake.

Slowly, hesitantly, she lifted her head. A wave of profound relief suddenly washed over her features, her lips parting. "You're awake," she whispered, her voice cracking heavily on the words, sounding completely raw.

You just stared at her, your chest heaving against your fractured ribs as you tried to make sense of the nightmare unfolding around you. You tried to process the sequence of events—the empty hideout, the sudden ambush, the rag, the restraints.

"Cipher," you breathed out, your voice a low, gravelly rasp.

Her gaze dropped instantly to the floor, veering away from your face as if looking at you caused her physical pain. She couldn't bear to meet your gaze. "...I know," she whispered to the dirt.

You violently tested the restraints again, throwing your weight forward, but the chains only let out a harsh, metallic clang against the stone wall. The panic was growing now, clawing at your throat. "Cipher!"

"I know! I—I know... I'm so sorry..." Her voice shrank into a tiny, pathetic whimper, her shoulders hitching.

You stared at her through the dim lantern light, your expression demanding an explanation, demanding that she make this make sense.

Eventually, she swallowed hard, her chest heaving as she forced herself to find her voice. "We're thieves, right?" She let out a shaky, erratic laugh that bordered on hysteria. "You're the best of us. You'll... you'll figure something out."

She let out another laugh, louder this time, more desperate.

"You always do," she whispered, her hands trembling violently against her knees. "You'll find a way to escape eventually. I know you will."

Something about the specific cadence of her tone made your stomach twist into a tight knot. Eventually. Not now. Eventually.

Your gaze narrowed, tracking down your outstretched arms, past the chains, until your eye finally landed on your wrists.

The fabric of your sleeves had been cut away. Thick, heavy layers of fresh white gauze were wrapped around your wrists—but it was already deeply stained with blooms of bright, wet crimson. The bandages had been changed recently, handled with a meticulous, agonizing care.

A terrible, cold realization washed over you. Slowly—very slowly—you tried to clench your hands. You tried to move your fingers.

Nothing happened.

Your heart stopped dead in your chest. You tried again, straining with everything you had, forcing every ounce of mental energy down your arms to your fingertips.

Nothing. It wasn't the heavy, sluggish weakness of a sprain or the dull ache of a bruise. It was an absolute, terrifying void. No response. No movement. No sensation whatsoever.

Your breathing instantly accelerated into a frantic, ragged hyperventilation. You looked down at your limp, unresponsive hands, then snapped your gaze back up to the girl sitting across from you.

Cipher was crying openly now, quietly, silently, the tears streaming in thick, glittering tracks down her pale cheeks. She still couldn't bring herself to look you in the face, her head bowed as if waiting for a blow to fall.

"Cipher," the word tore from your throat, hoarse, broken, and barely recognizable as your own voice. Her entire body shook with a violent sob at the sound of her name.
"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry..."

"Cipher, what did you do?!" This time, your voice cracked like a whip through the subterranean room—sharp, demanding, and utterly frantic with terror.

Finally, under the weight of your scream, she looked up, and her entire composure completely broke apart.

"I couldn't let you leave!" The confession exploded from her chest, ugly and terrified. "I tried!" she shrieked, the tears spilling over her eyelashes as she gestured wildly with her trembling hands. "I really, really tried!"

Her voice vibrated with a terrifying, unstable energy. "I thought... I thought if I just gave you a little time—" She took a sharp, gasping breath. "I thought if I could just convince you to wait a few weeks—" Another ragged breath, her chest heaving. "I thought maybe, just maybe, you'd change your mind and realize we could fix this!"

She suddenly buried her face entirely against her knees, her voice muffled and broken. "But you weren't going to. You were never going to change your mind."

The room fell into a deathly silence, the air around you full with the scent of blood. Your eye drifted back to your bound wrists, staring at the bloody gauze.

When she finally spoke again, her voice sounded completely ruined, stripped of everything that had ever made her, her. "I cut them."

Cipher curled herself into an even tighter, more compact ball on the crate, utterly incapable of looking at the wreckage she had made.

"The tendons in your wrists," the words slipped past her lips in a bare, threadbare whisper. "I... I cut them."

"I didn't know what else to do," she sobbed, letting out a pathetic, broken sound that was half-laugh, half-strangled sob. "You were leaving. You were actually going to walk out that door and never come back. I couldn't stop thinking about it. Every time I closed my eyes, I just saw you walking away into the fog." Her breathing became shallow and completely uneven. "I couldn't handle it. I couldn't."

You just stared at her, your mind entirely blank, completely unable to process the sheer magnitude of what you were hearing. What she had done to you. What it meant for the rest of your life. The hands that had defined you, the skills that had kept you alive, the future you had meticulously built—all of it robbed from you in a single action by the person you trusted most.

She finally forced herself to look up, her bleeding desperation.

"You can't survive out there in the world anymore," she said, the words tumbling out of her mouth in a frantic, rapid-fire rush, as though she had rehearsed them a thousand times in her head, desperate to justify the horror to herself. "T-think about it. You can't fight the guards anymore, you can't steal, you can't even climb the rooftops, let alone leave the city..."

Each sentence sounded more unhinged, more profoundly unstable than the last.

"But that's okay," she whispered, and a smile suddenly appeared on her tear-stained face. It was completely, terrifyingly wrong—a manic, fragile smile born of pure, unadulterated anguish. "I'll take care of everything from now on. I'll take care of you."

She immediately leaned forward off the crate, clinging to the delusion with a terrifying fervor. "I can steal enough for both of us! I can pull

double up on all my heists!" Her voice grew more animated, more frantic with every passing second. "I—I always have been able to keep up with you, right? I'll get the food, I'll get the medicine, I'll get whatever you need, whenever you want it!"

A shaky, breathless laugh escaped her lips.

"We already shared everything before anyway, right?" Her wide, bloodshot eyes searched yours, scanning your face with a desperate, agonizing hunger, looking for a single sliver of agreement, for a spark of understanding, for forgiveness. Anything to tell her she hadn't ruined everything.

"We'll stay together," she whispered, the words sounding like a ragged, whimpering plea rather than a statement of fact. "I'll make sure you're always safe here. Nobody can hurt you down here."

Another heavy tear rolled down her cheek, dripping onto her collar. "We'll stay together."

She repeated it again, her voice dropping into a small, looping chant. As though saying the words enough times would somehow make them true. As though repeating the lie would somehow undo the blood on the floorboards, undo the damage, undo the horrific choice she had made.

Her voice finally broke completely, dissolving into a ragged, breathless wail.

And in that final, devastating collapse, the legendary, untouchable Thief Star of Dolos completely vanished from the room. Leaving behind only a broken, terrified little girl. A creature driven entirely mad by the fear of abandonment, terrified of being left alone in a city that was rotting to pieces. A girl who had somehow convinced herself that permanently destroying the future and the freedom of the only person she cared about was a better alternative than losing them.

And as she sat there on the floor, weeping violently into her hands in front of your restrained form, it was painfully, beautifully obvious that some deep, uncorrupted part of her already knew exactly how monstrous that choice had been—and that she would have to live with that monster for the rest of her life.

Chapter End Notes

If cipher did this to me I would love her forever and ever and we

would be like totally best friends and whatnot. Like literally what are friends for if not permanently disabling you for the rest of your life out of a selfish desire to keep you in their life because their deepseated traumatic upbringing can't emotionally cope with something perceived as personal abandonment

Anyways yeah it should've been me please god its literally all I want in life its not fair also maybe smut continuation at a very later date, the idea is there but I got too much else on my plate rn just know that if I had to choose between 1 trillion dollars or cipher raping me while I am physically incapable of resisting due to a grievous injury she inflicted on me out of fear of abandonment then lets just say that theres an unplanned pregnancy in my near future heh

I am going to hell

End Notes

I want cipher to groom me highkey

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